

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ENGLISH (LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING)

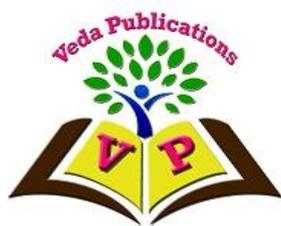
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ABSTRACT

“English is the language on which the sun does not set, whose users never sleep”

– Randolph Quirk and H.G.Widdowson



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Jawaharlal Nehru was once asked, during one of his overseas visits, ‘Mr. Nehru, you talk about the problems of India! Can you say roughly how many major problems you have?’ Nehru replied, ‘We have five hundred million problems in India.’ That was the approximate figure of the total population at that time. Now, one can say we have more than one billion problems in India! This is true of education and the teaching English in our country. It might sound light hearted, but the point Nehru was making was the magnitude, the unimaginably enormous proportions, the variety, and of the democratic experiment that the country has been engaged in. English teaching in India is the world’s largest democratic enterprise in the world. The pressure of population, pluralism and variety in all areas of life, the colonial legacy, political compulsions, illiteracy and lack of infrastructure, vested interests, the problem of training teachers – a combination of all these make English teaching in contemporary India a highly complex activity.

keywords: *Language, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing*

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The teaching and learning of English in India should become an agent of social change and produce a class of Indians not only in blood and color but in tastes, in opinions and in intellect – a class of Indians who will be socially responsible, productive and committed to the cause of nation-building. Learners of English in India have realized that English is necessary to talk about their own identity, their languages and literatures, their cultures and values and their land and contributions so that the world not only outside India but also outside their own state or linguistic community may know who these are. This ‘projection of one’s identity’ can be

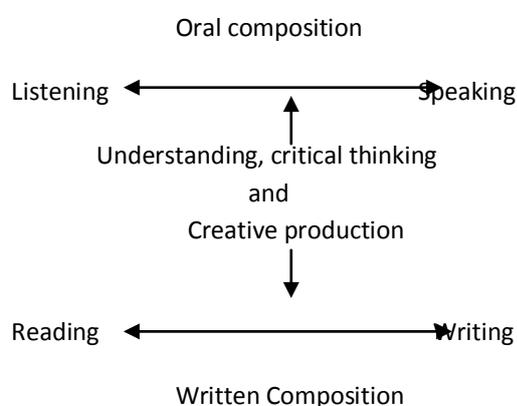
effectively done in an international language like English.

It is essential to design various courses that can satisfy different kinds of ‘learners’ at various levels of learning. A sincere attempt must be made to find alternative methods and evaluation systems which will promote the ‘alternative ideology’. This will be like a ‘Second Freedom Movement’ involving a large number of men and women – professionally committed and competent teachers, material producers who can write effective programmes for teaching and testing – and finding methodologies

that are appropriate to our own conditions. In short, English teaching must result in social transformation.

For this, we should evolve a model that will capture the synergic processes of language learning. Based on the Indian ways of language learning – appropriate and correct speaking on the basis of oral and aural practice, memorization and recitation and that is not just mechanical but based on the principles of reciting and describing of texts, thinking, enquiring and contemplative communication.

We should think of an alternative model as suggested below:



This dynamic model of language learning will promote the creative process; learning to use a language is more like learning how to write a play than learning how to act in one. The script for learners is not prepared by someone else; learners create appropriate language according to the situations that are encountered. It is a process of creative construction. An indigenous approach based on our own wisdom. An approach suitable for a multi-lingual and multi-cultural context must be evolved for teaching English in India.

Behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics based on behaviorism a set of assumptions regarding language learning were formulated in the 1950s and 1960s. They are:

- Language is a form of behavior and language learning is a matter of acquiring a set of habits; it is not an intellectual process. Since behavior can be conditioned, language teaching should follow the stimulus – response – reinforcement pattern; mimicry, memorization and various pattern drills in the classroom and the language laboratory are to be controlled, spaced and repeated.

- Language is a skills subject and it is not like science or geography that are content subjects. The four skills which constitute language mastery are LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing); in some methods like the audio-lingual method based on behaviorism the four skills are to be developed sequentially in that order.

- Few explicit grammar explanations are to be given since language is not a content subject; ‘drill the language and do not talk about the language’ was the guiding principle.

- Translation is to be avoided and the first language is not to be used in the teaching of the second language. This came to be known as the ‘Direct Method’

- Emphasis was given to the teaching of structures and vocabulary in a graded sequence. This came to be known as the ‘Structural Approach’.

Though the ‘audio-lingual revolution’, the ‘Direct Method’ and ‘Structural Approach’ brought into focus a ‘science of language teaching’ it was short-lived because the mechanical techniques that are mimicry, memorization and pattern practice failed to prepare the learners for spontaneous communication in the target language. The language learning is partly mental and partly behavioral and that it has a complex design with many interacting parts. Combining tools from psychology, computer science, linguistics, philosophy, neurology and artificial intelligence, a new science called ‘cognitive science’ has emerged. The acquisition of a cognitive structure such as language should be studied more or less like we study some complex bodily organ or human intelligence. It may not be just a Behavioristic or cognitive approach; a Developmental or Evolutionary psychology that will take into account how individuals develop as a result of various interacting forces at every point of time and how we keep integrating the different forces, building continuously the present over the past may have to be evolved in future.

Learning a language means learning the means by which a thought, an idea, an emotion, an experience, a fact or a piece of knowledge is conveyed or communicated. In that sense, language is a medium or a tool and the mastery of a tool comes with practice in the use of it. To be able to use

a tool we must learn the skill in the use of it and, therefore, language is spoken of as a skill subject, not a content subject like history or geography. In a way, it is not by learning the history of a language or its grammar or knowing the facts about the language that it can be mastered. It is only by constant practice, as in the case of cycling or swimming, that one can learn the skill of using it.

LISTENING

“We can communicate an idea around the world in seventy seconds, but it sometimes takes years for an idea to get through ¼ inch of human skull.” - Charles Kettering

Listening is the basic as well as the toughest skill to be developed. It is an active process which requires sensitivity, alertness, mental concentration and involvement. Appropriate physical postures like leaning forward, maintaining eye contact, nodding the head etc. make listening effective. It involves reaching into the thoughts and feelings behind a person's words. So good listeners should have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of others or empathize with the speaker. One should be open minded and objective to develop this challenging skill. Only a good listener can be an effective communicator. So this skill should be essentially practiced and nurtured by everyone.

One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears by listening to them. Listening is probably the most important communication skill. Listening is so vital that William Pitt went as far as to declare that ‘eloquence is in the assembly, not in the speaker.’ While all human beings are poor listeners at times, some are poor listeners most of the time. It is necessary to evaluate one's listening habits so that one starts treating the symptoms. No training can change a person entirely. However, by treating the causes of poor listening, we may become good communicators. It is said that a person's listening will express his attitudes to other people as surely as the way in which he speaks to them. Listening is also valuable since it creates the necessary conditions in which the mind can get to work, to sort out, restructure and digest what is being said. Listening is after all the basis of all human knowledge.

TEN TIPS FOR BETTER LISTENING

The ten tips for better listening given by Sherman, Bohlander and Chruden (1988) are:

1. Listen actively, sit up and look directly at the speaker.
2. Concentrate on what the speaker says – resist distractions.
3. Listen objectively, do not tune out the speaker whose ideas and biases differ from your own.
4. Listen not only for what is expressed orally but also pay attention to what is being expressed non-verbally.
5. Listen with empathy and understanding.
6. Ignore the personal characteristics of the speaker that may cause you to reject what is being said.
7. Listen for the main ideas and supporting facts.
8. Ask questions at the appropriate time if something is not clear.
9. Restate the content and feelings of the speaker to show understanding and acceptance.
10. Make notes when it is appropriate without interfering with the communication process.

CLUES FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Most persons talk at a speed of 125 words per minute. There is good evidence that if thought were measured in words per minute, most of us could think easily at about four times that rate. In order to cope up with the fast deliverance of speakers Keith Devis gives the ten guides for effective listening as under:

1. Stop talking.
2. Put the talker at ease.
3. Show the speaker that you want to listen.
4. Remove distractions.
5. Empathize with the talker.
6. Be patient.
7. Hold your temper.
8. Go easy on arguments and criticism.
9. Ask questions.
10. Stop talking – repeat – stop talking.

LISTENING AND HEARING

“I have heard you, enough. Don't say that to me again,” said the irritated husband.

"but you haven't even listened to me!" exclaimed the wife.

Listening is not an automatic process. We may hear but we may not listen. Listening is different from hearing. In hearing, the sound waves strike the eardrum, causing vibrations. These are then transmitted to the brain. Listening occurs only when the brain swings into action by reconstructing these electrochemical impulses by giving meaning to the sounds. Hearing cannot be stopped; it is a passive activity. Listening is not. Ravi's mother merely heard the sounds; she did not listen! True listening is a dynamic process. It involves more than the passive act of hearing. Teachers should clearly make the students understand the difference between this two. So that students may practice active listening this may help them to be a good communicators.

Breathing is a continuous process; listening is not. Listening is like deep breathing. When the yoga teacher instructs that deep breathing is good for health only then we take it up as a healthy exercise. Or, when making presentations, you might experience that deep breathing helps you to get over the fear factor. Listening therefore is a conscious activity like deep breathing, and therefore is not a passive one. The physical act of hearing, unfortunately, is so often taken as listening that it results into poor communication, which further results into misunderstanding or communication breakdown. You may ask yourself how often others have misunderstood you or you have failed to understand others because you are not receiving the thoughts correctly.

SPEAKING

"The ability to speak effectively is an acquirement rather than a gift" – William Jennings Bryan.

In order to teach reasonably good standard spoken English, the teacher should make a conscious effort to learn and use fairly acceptable pronunciation since the teachers English is the model for the learners. Secondly, the teacher should have a good knowledge of the elements of spoken English and English phonetics and must be in a position to refer to books and dictionaries that give information on the proper pronunciation of English. General Indian English (GIE), a non-native variety spoken by

educated Indians in India, has no proper teaching materials or dictionaries. There are just one or two books written by teachers in Hyderabad. In addition the so-called Indian variety varies from region to region.

The Indian teacher of English can minimize the regional accent and make the classroom variety free from regional features. This will be an achievable aim in teaching spoken English and serve the purpose within the country. For International interaction and intelligibility, one has to learn the British or American accent. Teachers should adopt models that meet local needs depending on the availability of materials, opportunities to study etc. at the same time; they should expose the learners to the British and American varieties.

IMPROVING ONE'S OWN PRONUNCIATION

Indians tend to read English from the printed word since that is how it is learnt: they do not speak it. We must accept the fact that speech is different from writing and make a conscious effort; practice makes us perfect. Improving one's own pronunciation is not a difficult task; it requires constant practice in listening and speaking. The sounds that are troublesome can be made the subject of intensive practice. Every day, teachers as well as learners can learn about ten words from a pronouncing dictionary and make it a point to learn the correct pronunciation.

ACTIVITY TO IMPROVE SPEAKING

Role play and role adoption can be used effectively for teaching spoken English. Role play techniques range from semi-scripted, to suit prescribed situations, to the entirely free, which is more difficult. Prescribed role play is, though not natural, effective and functional; it can be a rehearsal for effective functioning in the real world at a distant date and students at this sage can easily understand the purpose behind such practice. Small –talk activities in the use of language for socializing will be useful and interesting. Greetings and farewells, responding, thanking, praising, enquiring about health and chatting techniques can be used in the activities.

Discussions, short topic talks and interviews can be arranged. Mock interviews for jobs can be rehearsed. students can be asked to role play as film

personalities, VIPs etc. and other students can interview them and ask questions. Students can be asked to make short presentations on specified topics and others can question them for more information and clarification.

Listening to native accents, British and American, must be encouraged so that advanced level learners become accent – sensitive. Recorded speech can be played in the class and ask questions asked. This will help the learners to take standard tests.

QUALITIES OF A SKILLFUL SPEAKER

A speaker needs to have a few basic qualities in order to be a good speaker. The delivery of a speech is as much important as the content of the message. A good delivery originates in a groomed or trained mind. The following qualities are expected of a good speaker:

- ♦ Self-control – not feeling nervous.
- ♦ Poise – good command of body language.
- ♦ Awareness of people, time and place – full knowledge of the audience, time and the venue.
- ♦ Tact – the ability to blend with the audience and the matter.
- ♦ Decisiveness – being clear about the matter.
- ♦ Persuasiveness – the ability to make the audience see your point of view.
- ♦ Enthusiasm – never losing sight of the objective of the presentation and hence keeping up the spirit of the presentation.
- ♦ Honesty – not faking knowledge or information.
- ♦ Flexibility – not being rigid if there is a different point of interpretation from the audience.

Speaking effectively can have a dramatic effect in one's professional and private life. Plato has rightly said, "Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men". An effective speaker can easily influence others and achieve prominence in public life. The audience and context are the factors which decide the pitch, modulation, pace, pause and rhythm of speech. Apt body language, comprehensible language, clarity of voice enables one to become a good speaker.

READING

"It is the good reader that makes the good book." – R.W.Emerson.

Reading is a complex process that involves decoding the printed matter, comprehending it and adapting it to our requirement. Only a voracious reader can contribute to the flow of conversation. Reading enables a person understand the nuances of language and make the best use of it to suit his needs. A five point strategy for efficient reading is 1) Previewing the text. 2) Skimming 3) Scanning 4) Reviewing and 5) Note- taking. Reading, if done with hungry, curious and inquisitive mind, will help one reap rich dividends. In short 'Reading maketh a full man.'

The texts that are selected for reading must have variety so that students can choose what they want to read. They must be encouraged to read for some purpose, setting some goals for the reading task. Scanning and skimming are essential for extensive reading. For intensive reading they need different strategies. Silent reading must be encouraged so that they can read more. Learners must be guided towards greater reading speeds. Learners should learn to cope with passages with words and structures not known to them and read through difficulties by guessing the meaning.

The tendency to use authentic texts and not contrived are specially written ones. Well-written articles in newspapers and magazines are excellent sources and they offer considerable variety. In addition, simplified books, advertisements, timetables, recipes, menus, leaflets from a medicine pack or an electronic product, an application for a passport or a visa forms for sending a telegram or a money order – all these are small texts for reading. Depending on the nature of the text, reading tasks can be given. Simpler tasks can be used for difficult tasks and difficult tasks for simpler tasks.

SKIMMING

Skimming is done at a greater speed without reading each sentence. Skimming through a text means that only a few sentences are read here and there, recognizing certain expressions or words as clues to the ideas that follow. Skimming makes detailed reading unnecessary. For example if we are asked to suggest a title for a poem or a passage, we skim through the text to get a general idea of the text in order to suggest the title. In order to get some idea of the characters in a story or draw inferences about

certain events, we just skim through the text. Learners may be asked to compare events and say which one happened earlier or later. They can be asked even to frame questions for a given passage or note down important ideas and words. Many such tasks can be set for skimming a text.

SCANNING

We use different strategies for understanding texts. While scanning, we try to locate only specific information and often we do not even follow the linearity of the passage to locate the information we need. We simply let our eyes wander over the text until we find what we are looking for, whether it is a name or date, or some less specific piece of information. A reader with a good ability to scan is at a great advantage. It is very useful because we can scan through books, articles, notes, reports etc. and quickly locate the relevant information without wasting time. We scan a dictionary, an index book, a railway timetable, a telephone directory or even newspapers and advertisements; we do not read them carefully.

Scanning tasks are generally given for a specified part of a text, may be one or two paragraphs. Students are asked to read only that part of the text. They may be asked to find a particular word for which the meaning is given. For example learners may be asked to find the word that means 'obstruct movements of', or to find an expression that means the opposite of 'hurt' or 'damage' from a given text. They may also be asked to locate a grammatical feature for example a passive construction or a particular tense form etc.

INTENSIVE READING

If the purpose is to read a text in great detail or carefully intensive reading is required. Generally intensive or detailed reading is required for textbooks. Comprehensive questions, exercises on vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation are set to make the student read the text carefully. Students are asked to identify facts and separate facts from opinions. They are asked to summarize a passage or to fill in some gaps with suitable words or phrases. They can recorder sentences, paragraphs or even a part of a sentence in order to make them concentrate on details.

EXTENSIVE READING

It is a free reading for pleasure for interest in the subject matter or for the acquisition of information. Extensive reading is one of the ultimate aims of teaching English. It will enable the learners to acquire a window upon modern knowledge since modern knowledge is necessary for technical efficiency and empowerment. Moreover, extensive reading provides an encounter with language which is essential for the mastery of language, its natural contexts and various extended forms in which the language is used. Extensive reading alone provides the environment for the proper assimilation of the language and the mastery of expression.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Supplementary reading is in a sense or ought to be voluntary and purposeful non-detailed texts are prescribed mostly to encourage extensive reading.

In this competitive world one must develop the capability as well as competence. And reading books, as stores of information and ideas, is a busy element in that process of education or self-development. If you follow that and magnify your reading requirement accordingly, you now face two related problems not enough time or too much to read. They seem intractable, because you have all the time there is and no one can give more of it. Nor can anyone stem the spate of publications. There is however two possible solutions learn to read faster and become a more selective reader.

WRITING

"For a man to write well here are required three necessities to record the best authors, observe the best speakers and much exercise in his own style." – Ben Jonson.

Words have definite and exact meanings, which we read from dictionaries. Effective writing ultimately depends upon learning these definite and exact meanings and putting them to practical use. The meaning of the word changes like the chameleon depending upon the occasion, circumstances and the speaker or the listener. Writing is for others to read and understand.

Some original writing work may also be attempted. Children may be asked to write a few sentences, describing someone or something. For example they may be asked to describe their friends.

They may be asked to write about their daily activities or what their parents do daily. At a later stage, they may be given descriptive exercises on a scene on the playground, a street scene, the post office etc. Writing represents the stage of transition from controlled to guided writing. For example from dictation one can move on to note-taking. The teacher reads the text aloud and student's takes notes and write a paragraph, using the notes taken. Students can be asked to observe or watch an event and take notes. Then they write an account of what they observed. Story-telling is another activity that can be used for making them take down notes and write stories.

RULES FOR WRITING

A good writer should endeavor to be direct, simple, and lucid. Some of the general rules for writing are:

1. Prefer the familiar to the far – fetched.
2. Prefer the concrete word to the abstract.
3. Prefer a simple word to the complex.
4. Prefer the short word to the long.
5. Prefer the transitive verb to the intransitive verb.
6. Prefer active voice to passive voice.
7. Make your writing interesting to look at.
8. Be selective.
9. Use short paragraphs.
10. Add a heading.
11. Quickly revise.

SIX ELEMENTS TO WRITING

1. Content
2. Style
3. Diction
4. Flow

These can be artificially analyzed and dissected, but they should work together as a whole. Thoughts and efforts are necessary to develop the above elements. It is helpful to think of writing letters, memoranda, reports, dialogue as talking to someone on paper. Then you can apply to writing those key principles of clarity, planning and preparation, simplicity and vividness, naturalness and conciseness.

The four skills or abilities that comprise the mastery of a language are 1) listening 2) speaking 3) reading and 4) writing. The four skills are referred to

as LSRW and all the skills go, obviously, with understanding without which no language can be used effectively. Moreover, without listening no speaking is possible; so in order to speak, one has to listen. Similarly, without reading, no writing is possible; so one has to read in order to write. We can say that the four skills go in pairs.

We can also say that listening and reading are relatively passive or receptive or perceptive in character and speaking and writing are more active or productive. In reality, all the four skills interact with each other to produce the synergic effect called language; it is only for the sake of convenience of teaching and learning. We have to concentrate on the importance to be given to the four skills. The concept of 'library language' emphasizes the importance of reading and writing. But in the present-day world, we find that communication skills are demanded for employment purposes all over the world; in information technology, in electronic media, in meeting people and in interviews. Communication skills, in speaking as well as in writing, are basic to social mobility and economic success. So, in teaching English all the four aspects are important because we cannot teach speaking without teaching listening or teach writing without teaching reading.

In this global village, excellence in English has become the key for a successful career. Communication skill is not just synonymous with fluency in the language. It is more than that. It involves both verbal and non-verbal communication, revealing the whole personality of the communicator. Mastery in communication can be gained by developing the four macro skills - Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

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